

## The Seattle Ethics & Elections Commission

The SEEC is a seven-member, independent panel of citizen volunteers. The Commission and its staff are responsible for administering the City of Seattle Ethics, Elections, and Whistleblower Protection Codes. Three commissioners are appointed by the Mayor, three by the City Council, and the seventh by the other six. They are confirmed by the City Council and serve overlapping three-year terms.

The Commission is supported by a staff of six employees who provide training, investigate complaints, and issue advisory opinions.

**TRAINING AVAILABLE:** Departments and employees can receive training on Ethics and Employee Political Activity. Call the SEEC Trainer at 206-684-0595 to schedule training.

### COMMISSION MEETINGS

You are invited to attend any Commission meeting. Meetings are usually the first Wednesday of the month in the Seattle Municipal Tower.

Copies of the meeting agenda, including time and location, are in our office and on our Internet web site under Commission Activity. You can also call 206-684-8500 for meeting times and locations.



This brochure highlights the Seattle Ethics Code, SMC 4.16. The complete law is on the City Clerk's Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) web site, <http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/code1.htm>. Copies are also available in the SEEC office.

## ETHICS COMPLAINTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Anyone who feels a City officer or employee has violated the Ethics Code may complain to the Ethics and Elections Commission. Commission staff will investigate whether there is a Code violation.

If it is found that an employee or official violated the City's Ethics Code, the Commission may fine that person up to \$5,000 per violation or three times the economic value of the violation, if greater, plus costs and restitution. The Commission may also recommend disciplinary action, including a suspension or discharge.

A complaint may be dismissed if there is no violation of the Code or if the violation is minor and inadvertent or has already been properly remedied.

### ADVICE

Employees are encouraged to seek advice on whether a planned action or activity raises issues under the City's Ethics Code.



## City Of Seattle ETHICS AND ELECTIONS COMMISSION

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# Ethical Standards

for  
**City of Seattle  
Employees, Officers,  
and  
Members of Boards and  
Commissions**



*This pamphlet is intended to help City employees, elected officials, and members of City boards and commissions understand the conduct expected of them under the Seattle Ethics Code.*

## SEATTLE ETHICS AND ELECTIONS COMMISSION

*Your advocate for fair, open, and honest government.*

# Ethical Standards of The City of Seattle Code of Ethics

## Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 4.16

The Seattle Ethics Code is a set of rules about employee work activities, business relationships, and the use of City resources. It applies to all City employees, elected officials, and members of most City boards and commissions.

The Code was created to ensure that City officials make decisions that are in the public's interest, and not for the benefit of one person or group.



Created in 1971, the Seattle Ethics Code is intended to inspire public trust in City government and to guide employee conduct. It is administered by an independent committee of citizen volunteers.

*The Ethics Code has an appearance standard.* Under the appearance standard, an officer or employee should not work on projects or be involved in activities if a reasonable person, who has all the facts, would believe that there is a conflict of interest.

This standard requires that employees not only act ethically, but avoid actions that could appear unethical to a reasonable person.

**NOTE:** Management has the authority to set policies that may be more restrictive—but not more permissive—than the Ethics Code.

The Seattle Ethics Code does not cover all behavior that we might consider improper. Other policies, principles, and laws also apply to workplace behavior.



*These highlights are a general summary of the Ethics Code. If you have a specific issue, have questions, or need additional help, contact Commission staff.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

### FINANCIAL BENEFIT OR PRIVATE INTEREST

Employees cannot work on City projects where they have a financial benefit or private interest, directly or indirectly.

*Example: A City employee must withdraw from a selection process for a City job or contract if the employee's spouse is competing for the job or contract.*

*Example: If an employee is in a position of authority for a non-profit or for-profit organization, the employee has a vested interest in the organization. Therefore, the employee cannot be involved in City decisions involving the organization.*

Employees must also disqualify themselves when it would appear to a reasonable person that their independent judgment would be impaired in the performance of their official duties.

### USE OF CITY RESOURCES

Computers, phones, cars, supplies, paid time, equipment, and other resources are given to employees to do their City jobs. Use of City resources for other than doing your job can be a violation of the City's Ethics Code.

*Example: City cars cannot be used for personal shopping trips or for transporting personal items.*

**Note:** City employees may **never** use City resources for a private business.



*Example: Employees cannot put their City email addresses or cell-phone or pager numbers on their private business cards.*

Employees may use some resources for occasional personal activities, subject to management approval. The use cannot cost the City money, cannot interfere with City work, and cannot be for a private business.

*Example: Employees may use City phones or email to schedule medical appointments.*

### USE OF CITY POSITION

Employees cannot use their jobs or City money to benefit themselves or others.

*Example: Purchasing employees may not receive free gifts or premiums from vendors for placing City orders.*

### GIFTS AND LOANS

Employees cannot ask for or receive gifts, loans, or other things of value from people with whom they do City business.



*Example: Employees cannot ask for donations for non-profits or charities from City contractors or vendors they work with.*

Employees may accept gifts that are valued at less than \$25 **and** are communally shared. This allows workgroups to accept items such as chocolates or flowers that are sent to the workplace as tokens of appreciation or thanks.

### PRIVILEGED OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Employees cannot give out information that is available to them only as a City employee.

*Example: A City employee may not share information regarding a City promotional exam with someone who plans to take the exam.*

### FORMER CLIENTS AND PARTNERS

Employees cannot work on City projects that involve their former clients or partners, for one year after the outside relationship ends.

### AFTER LEAVING CITY EMPLOYMENT

Employees must wait one year after leaving the City before they can (i) assist others in proceedings involving their former agency, (ii) assist or represent others on matters in which they were officially involved, or (iii) compete for contracts when they helped determine the scope of work or the process for selecting a contractor.

*Example: For one year, former employees may not represent their new employers in contract negotiations with the City department they left.*